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informed of nationwide research, Altman says, to ensure that JHHS was keeping pace with others pursuing their FDA-approved artificial heart research. But through it all, the network has taken a working approach to innovation.

"We want to be [on the] leading edge in practical research," Altman says. "We want short-term applicability. We can't take 15 years to get to the market." Wagner calls it "translational research," meaning research that can be made clinically practical within five years.

Such advanced medical technology inevitably runs a parallel path with ethics—one of the JHHS board's chief responsibilities.

To safeguard implant recipients' rights and make sure they were entering the project with full knowledge, Abiomed and JHHS agreed that recipients should have a patient advocate. The advocate, a physician unaffiliated with JHHS, has the ongoing role of making sure patients are aware of all the risks and are fully informed on the progress of their care.

JHHS also instituted a "quiet period" following the implants, wherein the recipients' identities were withheld from the press until they wished to disclose them. When a patient media conference was held with the first recipient's permission in August, he was at a TV monitor several floors away from the press briefing room, to minimize the strain on his health.

Beyond patient considerations, Wagner says that the board's biggest concern has been the medical acceptability of the device—was it really dependable? Would it make a difference?

"We wanted to make sure this device would work like a donor heart," Altman says. "We asked, 'Does this have the potential to restore quality of life?' We didn't want it to just [result in the patient] staying alive."

"We don't want to be cowboys," Wagner says. "We will lend the good name of the Jewish Hospital organization only in cases where medical science has said 'We are now ready to do this.'"

For a hospital considering involvement in significant research of this type, Wagner has the following advice:

"It has to start with the hospital's mission statement and then be translated into the strategic plan." Also, physician leaders must be asked if they want to be pioneers.

"You have to come to grips with [such questions as] 'What are we really prepared to do? Can we articulate that in writing? Can we create a budget to underwrite it?'" Wagner advises. "You must create responsibility and accountability and assign specific people to fulfill the plan created. As you go through these steps you are validating and revalidating your organization's ability and willingness to take those steps. It has to become part of the organization's culture."

"'We wanted to make sure this device would work like a donor heart. We asked, 'Does this have the potential to restore quality of life?'"
—Henry "Sonny" Altman

Finally, he says, a hospital or health care system must have a firm bond with a school of medicine, which can take many years to cement.

Ultimately, the decision to be involved in pioneering medical research usually derives from the hospital's history, Wagner says. Most hospitals that perform leading-edge research procedures, he says, have been doing so for "50 or more years. It goes back to the hospital's origins." And how their board views the future.

"The implications of these implants go beyond the procedures," Altman says. This is not the end of a process but the beginning of one." **T**

LAURIE LARSON *is* Trustee*'s staff writer.*